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The Hunger of A Man's Soul

By CAMPBELL MACLEOD

It was after the play, and they were waiting in the quiet little cafe to be served. She leaned over to draw in the fragrance of the red roses and to avoid his eyes, which were persistent. He was thinking of how young and lovely she was. How could he expect her to love him? The mirror opposite reminded him of his years.

Yes, he would tell her—save her all painful explanations. A young fellow would make her happier. Once in a burst of girlish confidence she had told him how she hated young men and new houses. It was childish of him, he told himself, to expect her to know her own mind.

"What can I eat?" she beamed at him with shining eyes. "Anything, from a nice young man to an oyster!" Here was the opening, sooner than he expected.

"Judith," he began gravely, "it is of the young man I wish to speak now. Did—did—they say it is young Travers? Shall I release you?" The last, to the ear of the girl, seemed an anxious, frenzied appeal for freedom. So this was what made him so gloomy, so unlike himself. He was tired of her. He wanted to be free. She was pulling a rose to pieces and fitting the petals over her finger tips. "Shall we ring the curtain down on our little comedy?" he asked in an "it's all for the best" tone. She nodded slowly. She was beginning to see more clearly every minute, just as one's eyes grow accustomed to darkness after the first bewilderment—he wanted to be free.

"Judith," he said, "I shall ask only one favor of you." He hesitated.

"It is granted," she returned coldly. "Perhaps I shall have the honor of congratulating you—also." The "also" was added as an afterthought.

"It is that you will tell it all to me." He hesitated through a sense of delicacy. "If you mind, dear," he added gently, "then don't!"

Did she mind? she asked herself. No; she gloried in the opportunity. If he sighed for his freedom, he should have it. She would make no effort to hold him, but he should understand before she let him go that other men thought her desirable. Then he could go with his freedom, and she would marry any one of the others. It made no difference—she would take the one who next asked her. She was eighteen and infinitely young. The middle aged man opposite felt that he would barter his immortal soul to be twenty-four—to be young with her.

"Shall I begin at the beginning?" she asked in weary tones. He winced.

"No," he replied. "That would include me. Spare me that." There was a long silence. "It is of young Travers, your engagement"—

"Until tonight," she reminded in a dull voice, "I was engaged to you. But"— Her voice stuck. He was waiting for her to begin.

"Mrs. Carr, from New Orleans, was at the Springs," she began. "She is one of my mother's oldest friends. Mr. Travers is her nephew. It was at one of her receptions that I met him first. Shall I tell you everything?" Her voice had a new ring. He thought it was from speaking of her lover.

"Your roses came just as I was starting," she continued. "I wore the blue dress, the one you used to like me in"—

"Child," he interrupted, "you do not understand"—

"Yes, but I do," gayly. "I remember it, every bit. You told me that first night I wore it—do you remember it?—what you whispered out here on the gallery about my 'milk white arms and shadowy hair?' It is a pretty dress. I wore your roses to the reception. They were glorious ones!" She was leaning on her elbows on the table, her big eyes full of mystery.

"When Mrs. Carr presented Mr. Travers," she proceeded, "he told me that he had been knowing me for a long, long time and waiting for me to come, because his hands were tied, as it were, and he couldn't come after me. Then I laughed, because it was such a good joke—really, Bob, he said it very much nicer than I can remember. Then he went on to tell me that it was before the war he had known me. He just graduated two years ago. I am afraid I rather encouraged him in the nonsense. It was such a relief from talking to the women, and I can't help being silly, you know, Bob." His heart felt old and musty and failed, and her every word was giving it a fresh blow. She had made a little pyramid of the rose petals and was nervously tearing it to pieces to reconstruct it.

"He was very nice," she continued. "We went back to sit on the stairs to listen to the music. That was the beginning. He came next day for me to drive with him and told me that he loved me."

"The impudent young"— He forgot that it was of her lover he was speaking.

"He said he couldn't help it," she apologized for him in world weary accents. "But they all say that." There was no trace of vanity in the remark. The red of the roses found brilliant rivals in her cheeks. "Then—then one night," she hesitated, "it was moonlight—down on the beach—he kissed me"—

"He kissed you?" the man exclaimed. "How dare he—how dare you?"

"Don't be too hard on him," she pleaded. "He said something about men not despising a thief if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry."

Bob had risen angrily. A determined little hand pulled him back.

"Remember," a cold voice reminded, "you desired me to tell you."

"Judith!" he reproved sharply.

"And that wasn't all," and she flashed defiant eyes at him. She remembered how jealous he had been. Once she laughed and asked him if he thought the enamored air went sighing after her too. But that was when he had really cared for her. Now he was trying to get rid of her. "I had numerous other lovers at the Springs, Bob. It may be"—she tapped a gay little tune with her fan—"that you might find them diverting. There was Dave Cary"—she assigned her little finger to him—"and Fred Langles," the next finger to him, "both of whom proposed to me at the picnic on the fourth day of July. Then there was Mr. Greyner, who proposed to me at the dance at Judge Birrow's son's birthday—the son also proposed for that matter. Dr. Spaulding set my wrist when I sprained it, and when he dismissed me he asked me to be his wife. That's all the proposals I had at the springs. There were five more when I stopped to visit Lucy Killdare on my way home." The man made a gesture of entreaty. Truly, he had not dreamed of it being this bad. His heart felt like a church on a week day. How could he have ever been fool enough to expect Judith to love him against all these young men?

"If you marry Travers"— It was a cowardly subterfuge to get her away from the others. His voice stuck. She sat alert, with brilliant eyes.

"If I marry Travers, what?" she asked.

"I don't know," miserably.

"I haven't exactly decided which one I shall marry." She leaned back languidly. She was pushing her hair back and trying to pin it in place. "It's really very hard to make up one's mind, Bob. It's the number of them that confuses me." She laughed deliciously. His hand tightened around his glass.

"Bob," the girl suddenly demanded, "what's that you told me once about love lying deep?"

Could he release her? "The hunger of a man's soul" kept running through his head. Could he do it? Wasn't she in crying need of a protector to shield her from this very hunger?

"Bob"—she tossed him a rose—"have you forgotten the lines?"

"'Love lieth deep,'" he began. "'Love dwells not in lip depths. Love wraps his wings on either side the heart.'" There was a long silence. Somehow the silences of Bob were more eloquent than all the lip talk of the others. She was beginning to understand. She thought vaguely of ships cut loose from their moorings. She hated young men.

She remembered the first time she ever saw him. She was doing a skirt dance before the long gilt mirror in the back parlor. She turned to get a sidewise view of herself, and there in the door he was calmly watching her. The others were at the table. The occasion was a dinner party, and he had committed the unpardonable offense of being late. That was the beginning. He very much preferred staying with her, he declared, if she didn't mind. That was the night she started loving him. Hadn't he spent weary hours over the intricacies of toe dancing to coach her? Didn't Bob always understand? The thought that he was just across the table and not engaged to her any more almost suffocated her. She couldn't stand it.

"Bob," she said, with all that perilous youth shining in her eyes, "have you forgotten that toe dance you taught me years ago?" No, with weary resignation, he had not forgotten it.

"Bob," with cruel persistence, "when you told me that night that you had rather stay with me than to go with the old ladies, did you mean it, truly?"

Yes, he was sure he meant it truly. The cafe was deserted. Only Francois, the waiter, lurked in the background, and he couldn't speak English.

"Bob," moving nearer and laying a confiding hand on his arm; "Bob, does your love lie too deep for words?" There was a pleading quality in her tones not to be resisted.

"Child!" He was holding her chin in his most comforting hand and examining her eyes.

"Jack Travers didn't kiss me, truly," she comforted, patting Bob's old gray hairs tenderly. Francois had discreetly withdrawn, fully remunerated. "He said that before I told him about—about how I loved you—I—I told him all about us, Bob"— But she didn't finish. He understood. Bob always understood.

"Child," he whispered, with eyes in which youth had come home to live, "you must be the oldest person on earth. You are straight from the garden of Eden, with youth that is fresh and genuine and eternal. Yes, you are, child!"

Oysters With or Without.

"Sitting opposite me in a downtown oyster house the other day," said a clubman, "was one of those fastidious men who undertake to transmit instructions to the cook through the waiter. He wanted a twenty-five cent stew. As nearly as I can remember, these were his instructions:

"'Now, waiter, kindly tell the cook I don't want the oysters and milk merely mixed and heated. I want the milk carefully boiled first. The oysters should then be added without the liquor. The liquor should not be put in until the seasoning is added. Be very particular to get good rich milk and nothing but the best gilt edged butter. As for the oysters, I want Cape Cod salts. No ordinary stock oysters for me. Do you understand?'

"'I think so, sir,' replied the waiter. 'But do you wish the oysters with or without?'

"'With or without what?' asked the customer.

"'Pearls, sir.'"—New York Press.

Our Congress.

When comparisons are made between America and continental Europe we can find much of which to be proud. Our growth, our wealth, our industries, our resources, our energy, all make flattering comparison with average European conditions. But I believe in making such comparisons there is no one thing of which we have the right to be more proud than of the congress of the United States. Better than any continental parliament, it represents the people. The one legislative body of the world that is in any way comparable to ours is the parliament of Great Britain. In character, intellect, methods, dignity and in the truthfulness with which each represents the people the British parliament and the United States congress stand in a class quite apart and above any of the parliaments of continental Europe.—Frank A. Vanderlip in Scribner's.

Half a Face Missing.

"It is not an uncommon thing," says a man who has hunted in central Africa, "to meet a native with half of his face missing, and when you ask him how it happened he will tell you that a hyena snapped at him while he was asleep. It is marvelous how they recover from such wounds, as the teeth of the animal must be poisonous, and the natives have no antiseptics and a very crude way of treating wounds. When a 'fisi,' as the natives call it, comes round the camp howling, the 'boys' shout all sorts of vile names at it. But very often the animal makes no noise whatever, and not till next morning is the loss of something discovered."

Superstitious Parnell.

Miss Charlotte McCarthy, daughter of Justin McCarthy, told a curious story of Charles Stewart Parnell. "One evening," says she, "Parnell was talking to me at the coffee stage of dinner, and I, gazing at him with rapture, was vaguely stirring mine and going to drink it when he said: 'You must not drink that. You have stirred it the wrong way, and it would be unlucky. Get another cup.' What struck me as strange in this was not his being superstitious—every one who knew him at all knew that—but his extraordinary power of observation."